

POETRY QUARTERLY

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Typography by Seán Jennett

EDITORIAL

With the drone of the bomber again in our ears we have once more to consider the relationship of poetry to life. It may be said without likelihood of contradiction that the immediate position of anyone who wishes to publish verse could not be worse—or could it? Some publishers are still bringing out books of poetry, and good ones. They will probably continue to do so. Many think that fewer books of higher quality would be a welcome change. Publishers are inclined to agree, for the sordid reason that good books sell better than bad ones. But the contemporary reader should not be upset by the number of bad books published in his own time. He has only to ramble through the store of a big second-hand book dealer or familiarize himself with a few of their catalogues to realize the enormous number of books which make their appearance in every generation and which are now quite unreadable. It is for the reader himself to spot the book of lasting value in his own time. And how rarely does he do it? Time will sift us all and we shall never know what kind of eye from the future is looking over our shoulder at what we think is the perfect poem on our page.

There is one name, however, about which most of us feel there can be no argument, and that is Mr. T. S. Eliot. We should like to add then our small voice to the chorus of congratulations on his sixtieth birthday. To the incorrigible Georgian, Mr. Eliot is the bad boy of English poetry. It is true that he has done a great deal to change the rhythms content and the whole attitude of the poet to his material. His influence can be seen in the work of nearly every poet writing today. He may almost be styled the father of modern English verse. His victory is the greater in that most of us disagree with what he has to say. There is a timbre in the voice of the great poet which outlasts his doctrine.

KENNETH PATCHEN

'This Summer Earth'

This summer earth
Lion's skin spread on the warm ground
Beside the listening waters
O summer earth

Wheels of the golden chariot turning
Slowly over the breathing fields
Driver, we are
In sorrow here

O we are in sorrow here
Winter is in our hearts

Bird and leaf
These listening fields and breathing waters
Yes, and even
Your chariot's golden wheels
Are splashed with blood

There is no summer here
Why, even the tiny white blossoms
Of the wild cherry tree
Have been stained

*If a Poem can be Headed into its Proper Current
Someone will take it Within their Heart to the Power
and Beauty of Everybody*

Arrive to arrive and to arrive here in such thick
White silence
The eye turned away
Without vanity or desire
And seeing is seen
And the music of the silence flows on the world
With a rhythm and a pulse which are changed
In the blood-beat as the heart's course by death

And hearing is heard as in the very sea
There is no sound
So in the purest thought
When vanity and desire of all mortal ends
Have been submerged
We may join the thinking which is eternally around us
And be thought about
For the common good
Of the one creature which everything is

Man is not to direct or to be directed
Any more than a tree or a cloud or a stone

Man is not to rule or to be ruled
Any more than a faith or a truth or a love

Man is not to doubt or to be doubted
Any more than a wave or a seed or a fire

There is no problem in living
Which live hasn't answered to its own need
And we cannot direct, rule, or doubt what is beyond
Our highest ability to understand
We can only be humble before it
We can only worship ourselves because we are part of it

The eye in the leaf is watching out of our fingers
The ear in the stone is listening through our voices
The thought of the wave is thinking in our dreams
The faith of the seed is building with our deaths

I speak of the music of the silence
As being what is left when the singers and the dancers
Have grown still
Something is left there
A part of the reverence and of the need
A part of the fear and the pain and the wonder
And it goes on there
Coming from where it came from (O beautiful goddess!)
And reaching for what it can have little awareness of
A rhythm quite unlike any we know here
Bound and swayed as we are by the blood's orchestration
Bound and swayed as we are by the orchestration within us
by the deceptive orchestration of the blood

And I speak of the goddess
I speak of the goddess
I speak of the beautiful goddess

O tell them what I would say

The New Being

They'd make you believe that your problem is one of sex,
That men and women have mysteriously become
Strange and fearful to one another—sick, diseased, cold—
And that is true. But no loss of a father-image, or of
Any other image, did this. Why don't you face the truth
for once?
You have accepted the whole filthy, murderous swindle
without
A word of protest, hated whomever you were told to hate,
Slaughtered whomever you were told to slaughter, you've lied,
Cheated, made the earth stink with your very presence—Why
Shouldn't you despise and hate one another? Why shouldn't
Your flesh crawl every time you touch one another?
Why should you expect to make 'love' in a bed fouled with
corpses?

Oh, you poor, weak little frauds, sucking around
Frantically for something to ease your guilt——
Why don't you face it?
Your birthright, liferight,
Deathright, and now
Sexright you've lost. What
Did you expect? How
Else could it be? You've
Made property and money your only gods——
Well, this is their rule,
This is what you wanted.
And now they'll wipe you out.
Why don't you face it?
Stop sucking around.
Your pet witch-doctors can't help you,
They're all sick from the same thing.
Your pompous intellectuals can't help you,
They're all sick from the same thing.
Your sly, vicious statesmen can't help you,
They're all sick from the same thing.
Why don't you face it?

No, your problem is not one of sex——
Your problem is that you have betrayed your animal
Into hands as cruel and bloody as your own.
Man is dead.
I don't know what kind of thing you are.

JOHN HEATH-STUBBS

Churchyard of St. Mary Magdalene, Old Milton

Here, where my father lies under the ornamental plum,
Geese step in the next farm-field, while to the rectory elms
The rooks fly home. *Dominus exaltatio mea*—
The eagle rising with its sprig of acorns.

Feet deep in sticky clay, under the kempt grasses,
Under the anglo-saxon and the celtic crosses,
The Indian judges lie, the admirals, the solicitors,
The eccentric ladies, and the shopkeepers,
The unenterprising who would not go to the town,
The charwoman with a cleft palate, the jobbing gardener,
And the four Germans who fell, some few years back,
Out of a sky of trouble, smashed
In an empty field—these have
Their regulation crosses too, of wood,
And scattered flowers, left by the prisoners:
The old woman whom I meet
Remarks that after all they were somebody's sons
And we would do as much for our people.

'The writer returns to the scene of his childhood'—
Where he loitered and looked at the rooks and the geese and the
turkeys,
Or sought for wild barley by the churchyard gate—
The caterpillar-grass
Whose insect heads climb slowly up your sleeve;
The rootless writer, filling his town lungs
With a gust of country air. A grey afternoon,
And in the sky, the promise of evening's rain.

Where people come to take the air and die,
Ending their lives here on an adequate pension,
A sickly child, brought there by careful parents,
Might mend in the salt breeze. From six to twenty-four
Home was this scattered residential village of bungalows,
Of gabled villas, and neglected fallows,
Crazy paving, gravel, and tarmac. Now he comes back
And stands unrecognized among these graves.

The church here under John, that lackland king,
(The guide-book says), rebuilt under Elizabeth:
(The tower still stands, four-square, looks down upon
The village green, a row of shops, a garage
Crimson and yellow with petrol-pumps,
A line of cottages, a blacksmith's forge—
A child, I remember that darkness and smoke and music—
Two adjacent public-houses, the 'George' and 'Wheatsheaf',
And the post-office store, where stands behind the jumble
Of picture-postcards, cigarettes, and buttons,
The dusty case with its stuffed gannet and guillemot).
Rebuilt under Elizabeth, restored under Victoria,
(The green distempered walls, peeling to white patches,
Which took, at sermon time, the shapes of islands—
White islands, in a green smooth-glistening sea).

Lie here the serfs, the yeomen, and the gentry,
Under their mounds, and single stones, and vaults yellow with
lichen;
Of all those faces, one only gazes still—
Queen Anne's colonel, in effigy, pompous his armour,
His helmet beside him, a ringleted wig of stone
Framing his vacant brow. His sword, that steel blade,
Which he drew against the French, is hung above him
Over the blurred inscription, on the left of the porch.

A torch borne in the wind, a drift of sparks and smoke
As the racer rounds the track in the bright sunlight,
Dust-puff, and dream, and shadow. . . .

A drop of rain, a large, warm drop,
A rustle in the tresses of the elm,
A breath of perfume, twitched by the light breeze
From the fading flowers laid on the Italian marble—
But these evoke the sudden splendour of bright hair
Unloosed from the darkness of a penitent snood,
Sweetness, and the splintering of the alabaster-sealed heart;
Somewhere among these tombs a woman's voice is sobbing;
Among these fragments grope the white and delicate hands
Of the Anointer of the Dead, who comes in the dark hour
Bringing her spices for the early dawn.

A fountain of lamentation above the firmament, a human
River of tears, that knows all streets, alleys, and dark courts,
And bears upon its little waves
Sticks and straws and dragged cigarette-ends,
The gutter's refuse and corruption, on
Past Roman causeways, through black hearts of cities.
A girl, mad as grief, trudging the hard roads,
A woman, with a few ripe ears, in a country of famine,
The august queen of the shrunken banks of Nile,
Who seeks the body of her murdered Lord;
A girl, sorry as sin, and broken as contrition.

Lady of Magdala's tower, and the dower of Bethany,
You who are called patron here, forgive
The little lives, partial and fugitive existences,
The gestures of love frozen in a pose of propriety,
And starved desire, with malice that lies on a turning bed;
Forgive the tyrannies of the hearthstone, and the small politics
Of the local interest, the lonely and the evil;
Ask pardon for the community without a heart, and the betrayal
Of the backward years, and the uncomplaining dead.
Carry these lives, these parts of lives, these yellow leaves
Drifted in autumn from the tree of the world, upon
Your tides of intercession, down
To a sea thirsty with love, where the breakers lift
White triumphing hands—insatiable,
Where the free gull tacks to the courteous southern stars,
With arched and frost-pale pinion;
Oh, in Death's garden be
Prime witness of the only Resurrection.

TESSA SILLARS

Resurrection

Wearing His pale, drained Body like a garment
Stiff and chill, not yet warmed or accustomed,
He walked soon in the garden,
In the white, early sun, diluted still with dawnlight.
And a great, great loneliness upon Him,
The loneliness of God, His manhood spent
Upon the great purpose of His dying.
An in-between moment that waits
To make the new challenge
Of the Resurrection.

These phantom feet feel neither flints, nor dew nor
flowers;
These pierced white hands the weeping Magdalene
would touch
For solace,
Must refrain.
'I am not yet ascended to My Father'.

From the beginning of the Word to the *Consumatum est*
There had been friendliness to mitigate
His loneliness.
But the great division of the Cross
Cleft the upward curve of ordained purpose,
Left this moment in suspension,
To wait the last fulfilment of the prophecies.

A tracery of shadows, a whisper of irrelevant trifles,
A pressure of dispassionate events,
Crowd into the garden where He walks,
Outlawed from the world of sense,
Held in this lapsed loop of time
Between the purpose and its fulfilment;
He stood in the garden waiting
For the sun to rise;
He wanted light and warmth
To quicken the new Beginning.

So cold and so alone!
His friends remote in fearful hiding;
The world, resuming its indifferent business,
Tidies away discomfortable remembrance;
No one but this weeping sinner
Wanting, in her woman's way, His warm Humanity,
That He has put aside
With folded grave-clothes in the tomb.

And now the garden sickens with the breath
Of wistfulness;
Miasmic exudations of image-making myths
Corrode the stone precepts of the law
With loopholes of evasion,
Softening the jutting angularities into easy, sliding shapes.

Swiftly!
Severely!
Lift the unambiguous sun
To measure the implications of the conflict,
To make contraction in discursive space.

'There must be order and an edifice.
Where is Peter? I must build My Church!'

Convent Chapel

I

They disciplined our knees;
We, in the quiet morning,
In the extinguished smell of candles,
Kneeling with new-washed ears
Disregardful of the priestly solo,
Attentive to the elsewhere world
That beat a branch against the altar window.

They bowed our heads in similar white veils,
Scrupulously hostile to our separate identities:
Coupling the incomprehensible with the level
Incontestible:
Nourishing excess with moderate abstinence.

They joined our hands and called it the Communion
of Saints,
Shaping our indifferent fingers
Round the lily stalk and candle.
(Its waxen flesh adhering to
Our sensitive, uncomprehending palms.)

Bent knees, veiled heads, and modest hands,
All these are apt and purposeful
Towards a governed growth,
Too swiftly shaping premature finality,
Killing the potentiality that lies
In tilted angles and living contradiction.

Convent Chapel

II

Three times, though quietly, the silver bell
Compels;
Stills and tautens
Air high-shaken with the breathy singing
Of the crocus children.
White flower petals, candle flames,
And a child's precarious hold on solemn things,
Are quiet in their unique fragility,
Dissolve their transience in the muted moment.

Mystery withholds its dread,
Its sweet luxuriance, fills the hearts
That open like their lifted faces.
(Like a Pentecostal opening
Of unlearned hearts.)

The Paraclete, the Father, speak
Through the Body of the Son,
The great, mysterious Unity
Of
Three in One.

The hearts of children lift to take
Things so tremendous, there must break
A wave of that Magnificence
Which, seeded there, can never lie
At ease with triviality.

So, take your candle, gentle child;
It will be necessary
To bear it with a scrupulous attention,
Schooled and serious concentration.

Let the wax melt!
And watch
In your instructed heart, a flame,
A leaping, lovely tongue of fire,
Where the Spirit moves.

This is important in the growth of children,
This tension of contributory opposites;
An ordered shapeliness of ways measures the cool
bone,
Contains the heart,
But the lift, the light, the torment, co-exist,
A limitless expansion of experience towards the
Infinite.

DAVID WRIGHT

Poem

For JOHN FAIRFAX

I flung a stone into a dream,
Into a dream I flung a stone,
And saw the stone within the dream
As the dream peering on the stone.
O rock and water of my father,
O bread and wine I bless upon
The breath and pestle of my heart
That grinds me mortal into man,
Lay grace upon my heart, my head,
And wrap about the shining bone
What is immortal that I mourn.

Two Love Lyrics

I

I see her personal beauty make
A rival of the wind,
Whose liberty
Must subject be
Under the thin bones of her hand.
In silence watch her island face
Rifle the liberty of water,
Assume the quality of air;
With individual
And undefended grace,
With love for no one, but for all,
Disperse these benefits, and let
The equal air of freedom fall.

The seasons lean from her, the colour
And features of the spring,
The general
Green apparel

That the returning summers bring;
O deck the caged in autumn face
With garlands of earlier flower,
And revive the inward fire
That consumes sorrow;
To whom joy does distress,
So turns to ice, you winds that sometimes blow,
Display the fields of love beneath
The winter eiderdown of snow.

II

In sleep her rippled image breaks
The surfaces of night,
The dreamless ways,
And clouded lies
Royal in the alcoves of sleep,
In the chrysalis of calm.
Like a swan upon a dark river's
Bosom, her unresolved features,
Unknown, familiar,
And seeming still the same,
Are one with all visages that occur
To love, herself and all women,
As galaxies may seem one star.

Though she, divided from my sleep
A hemisphere between
By the cold fringe
Of seas waving
And by the landscapes of the wind,
Never my naked lover lay
On the burned ranges of desire;
I from the incommunicable tower
Of solitary love
The words of love essay,
Where, as a morning breaks upon a grove
Of silent birds, until they sing,
Moving to beauty, she does move.

NICHOLAS MOORE

Mr. Amotion upon the Motiveless Passion

Now that the thighs' dark whiteness burns
Under the simple sheet of death,
A death for me, the one who yearns
Keyless and empty for the room,
I walk in graves to meet my doom,
 With stumbling breath.

This, in the rocky evening seas
Of spume and slaughter, is my flesh,
Who only taste of memories,
Wearing myself out rubbing down,
A tall and always toppling town,
 Not where I wish.

In those cool lakes Aladdin lies
And rubs his candle endlessly
Until a geni from the skies,
Bringing him divers' instruments,
Allows the boy to plumb his sense,
 But O not me!

I watch from in a shadow tomb
The creaking gestures of our bones,
As we ride grappling with our doom,
In stony sheets that do not hide
The worm's attrition or the wide
 Expanse of stones;

The knobs and gobbets of our fate,
The hand that falters as it slides,
The tongue that drinks a draught of hate,
And does not find love there at all
In vacuous sky or gimlet hole,
 Which nowhere hides,

But like a toad in winter lives
Mysteriously in elements
We never meet, and so contrives
In summer to emerge again,
Grown gross and hideous with pain,
To tease our sense.

That is the image we admire,
The tireless ancient's will to love
With never quite exhausted fire,
So that we all, like an old frog,
Shake tedious passions from each leg,
Yet scarcely move.

W. J. STRACHAN

Perfection's Image

Admire, but envy not, perfection's image,
the white swan,
swimming along our lives' perimeter,
on and on. . . .

The dazzling arabesque,
the inscrutable mien,
the black mask
that bounds the narrow brain,
make us forget,
as she forgets
last year's cygnets,
lost as we are in wonder at her grace
that decorates the visible world,
the possessiveness
of a jealous race.

A strong wing unfurled
divides our ways. . . .
Watch from the fringe
her strange
mysteries.

Battersea 1948

TO HENRY MOORE

Three chimneys soar against a violet haze,
A coil of smoke about each towering rim
Writhing and red caught in the sun's last rays,
The distant descant in this modern hymn
To harnessed power, served by its sullen team,
That governs indifferently the nights and days.

Three sculptured forms among the pillared trees,
Timelessly anxious in their prison of stone,
The heavy drapery about their knees
Echoing the burden kindred to each one
That each within herself must bear alone,
Since the uplifted heads spy no release.

ERIC NIXON

Poem

The arabesques of flesh
are grained by will
involuntary as love
or the grey lip of fear

move with the shadow
and the quiet tread of time
beyond the cage of bone
or the first inward sneer

breathe the contours of the air
sure as the homeward ant,
possess the litanies of trees
flowering in the ear

but know the frost which burns
shrubs of the lung and brain
the void the vacant day
locked in the ultimate tear.

Poem from the Eden Valley

I

Each fortress village patterns the valley
with weather-grained rock
grey as the Nine Cairns or the careless sheep:
here no deceit can endure where the farms hide
hugging the scooped hollows of the sloping fell
nor feeble hand feel or find a friend
in the dry-stone walls
which rope the leaping fields
to the summit horizon poised under the innocent sky.

But being born here I know this is a calm land,
quiet of colour, soberly green
sombre home of a soft-tongued people
elemental as love, old as the breast
solemn as priests
unshakable.

In the valley are the cities of trees
defiant under the slate-coloured clouds,
the musing fields clothing the skeleton of rocks
patient and well as a practical mother.

Here at times and on the fell-sides always
silence is as enduring as a rock
save for the low chant of a beck
or the call of a curlew ripping the virgin air
above the intruder.

Peace wraps with an affectionate cloak the living
and through the living the dead
undisturbed in the lush meadows of the past,
who walk in thought and habit
this northern cloister of austere fells
finding little to disturb their memories of life
certain that man is the servant of the seasons.

At each corner history crumbles;
on steep hills bearing names betokening sword and death
the hungry fire flowering the evening sky
the old stone gilded with blood
the broken wall falling to the ditch.

From these, myths and legends
lean into this present
living on lips and fragmentary towers
where a few stones huddle awaiting death
seven centuries after their masters
have chiselled their final signature.

The wind blows for their destruction
the wearing rain over their graves and skeleton castles,
the grass caresses bone and shard,
moulds the moats, soothing the aching field
smoothing the ring into soft green nipples of land;
the grey dust feeds the ambitious weeds
the metallic ivy cloaking the walls
discovering the stubborn Norman arches
which for centuries have defied the inviolable hills
set like gods under the northern sky
—cells for knights and widows
who sought a sign from the indifferent fells
hoping all but receiving the badge of death
the void mouth of the silent skull
thrust on the triumphant spear.

But now in this time
allow the sun its heraldic landscape
curve fold and loop, the old roads
green as water ascending the hills
in Roman precision revealed,
the cushions of moss padding the walls of lanes
which cut the valley into profuse enlacement,
fields rough brown or multi-hued in green;
higher the wine-flowered heather
and the fiery spirals of bracken
spilling from the fells
to the broadening funnel following
the river to the sea
unrolling like a scroll
the ravelled melancholy folksong valley
cupped by the crustacean Pennines.

II

So sleeps the evil of the past
sharp metal to rust
strong walls to dust
the fabric cracked by rime
worn by the rain
from grain to grain
runnelling to the earth
with every breath of time;

but now the evil of the present
rebounds hot shells
over the patient fells
destroying the peace with an omen
of the menace
even in this place
wearing the face of men
with fear of their own power
at this time and at this hour.

At this time and at this hour
I am in the wind and the white webs of the mist
flux of purity and mystery of light
filling the valley with drifting trees
emerging fields and floating hills
houses as ships and churches as rocks
all, all ephemeral as the tides
and in the ear the drumroll of the guns
—the loved ones of the suicides.

But they will not remain;
yet shall I walk into a dip I know
like the valley of a green wave of a frozen sea
away from everything but sky and fell
and there to feel a mystic purity
so beautiful I am afraid
for there I know
sweet silence breathing like a bee
over gill and green fell grows
a flower of solitude
purer than the lily or the golden rose.

WILLIAM PORRITT

Not Happy in Eden

Not happy in Eden, would there from this
Enchantingly always be one to be loved
Or moods the mind pursued—not there
No, not that side of regarded heaven
But bred from smiling myths repeating
Was heaven the anywhere out of the now.

Only can angels bear to love the present.
These you and I have sensed, yet silence always
Hid a proof that speech would thread on song.
Then looked for, only remaining and worn absence
Hinted their possibleness, and searching more
Could never first offset our unimagination.

Courageous they and fiery, winged and blessed
Heavy with secrets from original heaven,
Who bow to touch and praise and take
The utmost from the breathing, moving moment.
But where are these for we who humanly after
Asking and search must have a kneeling end?

Near us and with us humbly like fragments
Splintered from a whole of ruby glass
Lying in the storm-end loss of dust and debris
Unwatched except in sunlight when the noon
Of some prying truth in every hiding aspect
For every self insists that self's revealing.

Artisans, rulers, sweepers, O, brothers!
What is the word relating every common heart
That said, effects if only for an offchance hour
The end of this moving, each like a sleeper
Intent on defacing the beauty of the now,
And men as death does, effacing with every act?

MURIEL SPARK

A Letter to Howard

My love, full of wonder today I call you by everlasting,
I call you by tide and by rock, by the name of those
fowl and fishes that people them. Trees have affinity
with shells, anemones with leopards since I gather
their differences together in your name.

I am thinking now of the Scottish hills I knew
as a child when first I saw the Fates, and again
the myth rose up from the North Sea, and again
when I sat by myself on the shore those beauties moved
in to my side, their spiky flames like starfish.
Therefore I call you by sea and by cave, I call you
by hill, by covenant and sword and the martyrs of fire,
I call you by choir and the glass stained with the spectrum.

It was the snow on the ground I had in mind
when I came on the sealed virgin lying in frost
and I trod her all the morning.
I shall not suffer the vision now to rack me
but call you by breaker of ice, by melter of host,
but call you by name of all who lie and hammer
the frozen ground with a small silver mallet,
but I call you by faith, by miracle and morning.

When first I saw the plains of Africa falling
waste upon waste, I took the wilderness
into my arms and he entered my ears, he
stopped my mouth with sand, his hand compressed me
and I opened out to him, the dry devil.
But set my heart on the waterfall,
wonderful as a giant striding his trees, and thus
I call you by river, by thicket of boars, by
agate rock and by lion; I call you by sun
to the last flamingo of your falling asleep.

As sometimes a dancer will cease on a movement,
giving the laugh with a gesture, so with the jerk
on my tongue I call you by weird, by trick and
by jolt of the spine, by flick of the knee and by
tug of the hair, I call you akimbo, I call
you by mirth of the hip and the twined leg.

Full of wonder today I cannot leave
these names to the wind of nothings,
but I must send them out in their multiples,
calling you mystic numbers and I call you by three,
I call you by nine from the first to the last advent,
by nines of nines whereof I bring to witness
the signing of your name, radiant in all my legends.

IRIS BIRTWISTLE

Even the Wild-eyed Sea

Even the wild-eyed sea shows tenderness
who leaves his hoof hard on impressionable shore
but in flush and flood of tide's height moves
with desire towards white-breasted sandhills.

No tenderness flows from tenacious cities
scratching a living in the pocket of an old child,
no palm or pearl for man's begetter
seasoned with work and a womb's forced flowers,
whose tamed hand stretches for bread
and compassionate night, stretches towards
fugal comfort of polished box and scattered earth
more generous than coined kindness in a hollow tray.

Even the wild-eyed sea shows tenderness
but pigeon-chested towns have circumscribed
the heart where pity like a dancing
bear limps round a blighted tree,
or with the wistful antics of a hungry child
squats in the doorway of a public house.

JOHN BAYLISS

An Old Woman in Parliament Square

Under the shadow of the clock I sit
where small keen winds like needles prick my bones.
Night drags my lank grey hair into its net
and my shrunk eyes see where the clock face burns.

The quarters strike across the wide cold square.
Late traffic fades. The dark light of the stars
chafes my thin cheek like blossoms on a briar
caught by the winds too early in their wars.

The last man goes. His footsteps merge and die
far out upon the bridge whose lamps glow on
as they will do until the chill of day
breaks through my eyes and finds me still alone.

Embankment Scene

Thickness of water and the quick uneasy tide,
the queasy dead with corpse-lights eddying.
Thin roofs that cut the sky like upturned spades
and we like kittens drowned at christening.

Our sanity the mark that bids us die.
Our sexual follies but humanities
lost as the dark rain that fills our sky,—
so we go down with all our vanities.

And on the cold embankment where the dawn
colours the air a moment while we shiver,
the statues fold their shadows on the lawn
and the grey day comes down, it seems for ever.

IAN BEITH

Mozart:
Piano Concerto in B Flat Major, K.595

(His last, played in the Himmelfortgasse,
Vienna, 1791, the year of his death)

Let the lingering ocean finger its way along the shore,
And the cries of gulls dwindle in the night
Into distant whispering of stars,
Beyond but playing on the roofs
And on the fans closing in the concert-hall,
Himmelfortgasse.

Alone,
Struck down from the sky, the thunder-riven heart
Floods through the bankrupt hall;
The golden palace built by the magic hands
Crumbles in cadences of uttermost despair;
Then leaps the question—For whom
Should I have ripped the ore out of my heart?—
The guest, long since forgotten,
Is waiting now and ready to depart.
Beyond
The sea lapping on the shore, beyond the stars
Is joy.

C. BUSBY SMITH

Andromache at Epirus

O so much she loved that all her grief she wore
like a dark garment on her in a foreign city
so that the sun fell away and perpetual dark
grew like a myrtle bush round her. No diamond stones
gleamed from the ground she trod though the jubilant
pavement
ran in a golden river to the capital's centre.
She in her deep grave lived, forgotten by the Gods;

and Hector's long white arms about her neck
dragged her dark head down till the lucent hair
fell like a cloud of thunder over her breasts.

All day the talk of the shoppers knocked at her ear;
the barter of fruit and meat; the jangle of sold trinkets,
and the giggling chatter of girls. She in the shadow stood
seeing the sandal-thongs swinging in the wind
the price marked strangely on them, and when a rough
unknown and foreign hand eddied the whispering cords
and snatched one from the iron hook she saw
white in the sudden sunlight of the empty space
a single trickle of blood on a dead man's foot,
and wept as once more Hector's arms embraced her.

PAUL ELUARD

Your Hair Like Oranges

Your hair like oranges in the emptiness of the world
In the emptiness of stained glass heavy with silence
And with shadows where my hands search for all your
reflections.

The outline of your heart is a chimera
And your love resembles my lost desire.
O sighs of amber, dreams, glances.

But you have not always been with me. My memory
Is still darkened by having seen you come
And go. Time uses words as love does.

'Nouveaux Poèmes'

(Translated by JAMES KIRKUP)

THE MOST ALIEN OF ALL

The Jew today is fighting not only for the right of a country but also for the necessary truth of a racial dignity. Perhaps the Gentile can never sufficiently appreciate how the Jew even as a boy, has to suffer his humiliations in the paradox of a 'Christian' society. Any day of the week after school, you can see him running home to the safety of his mother's arms, and it is she who restores his pride. She sadly reminds him of the great leaders of Jewish history, of those names such as Moses and Judas Maccabeus; 'You ought to be proud', I can hear her saying, 'you ought to be proud to be a Jew'. And so he is for awhile, until later, further indignities tempt Moses down Sinai towards the golden calf. Some Jews succumb: their courage, their pride, their dignity, is gradually drained away. We all know that Jew who does not wish to identify himself with Jewry; some, even one degree less, are 'anti-Semitic', and these have lost the last vestiges of dignity. Such a Jew is as pitiful as he is contemptible.

It is no wonder that we can see in so many exiles' faces the private crime and the public pogrom. Note, when the word 'history' is spoken, how his dark eyes reveal the sudden sensitive wound and the ineffable melancholy. But the Jew born in Palestine, he looks different, his stature is different, he is not weighed down by the terrible load of European tears, by the crucifixion. He does not carry his Judaism as a deformity, for his dignity is intact—all around him even the dogs bark in Hebrew, and the very birds have read the Bible. Today the Palestinian Jew is fighting for a racial dignity, for the exile's dignity also, and modern Hebrew poetry has a place in this proud grandeur of living. Out of the work and love and tragedy and joy of life in this new old country Israel, has risen a presentation of language shaped with the tenderness of the mother for her new-born. The twentieth-century Hebrew poets, Bialik and Tchernichovsky (both now dead) continued a tradition which is further developed by such contemporary writers as Shlonsky, Leah Goldberg and Nathan Alterman. This tradition of Hebrew writing commenced in the Bible, continued through the midrachic fragments of the Torah, through the golden age in Spain (950-1250), indeed through all the ages to re-emerge still virile in modern Hebrew poetry.

Despite the comparative tolerance that Jews enjoyed for centuries in Spain, the longing for Zion never abated. Jehudah Halevi was speaking in more than personal terms when, about one thousand years ago, he was composing such lines as:

*My heart is in the East, and I in the uttermost West.
How can I find savour in food?
How shall it be sweet to me?*

(Jehudah Halevi)

This spiritual yearning for the return is ancient and real. Whether this longing is an illusion of a race desiring an abode of perfection—a land of milk and honey—or merely the child desiring to return to the safety of the womb, is in immediate terms irrelevant: it is a desire as real as this paper, it is a desire that begins to be consummated. Already there is a community in which the ancient Hebrew culture and the beautiful Hebrew tongue comes into its own again.

Such modern poets of Palestine as Shlonsky, Goldberg and Alterman were born either in Russia or in Poland, but they became familiar with the Hebrew language at an early age, and sooner or later were drawn to Israel by spiritual ties and by the material fear of further pogroms in Europe.

'I will not remain in Europe. . . . It is there (Israel) that I shall want to see things in all their breadth and depth. For it always seems to me that if we dig deeply there, we shall arrive at the geological layers which still bear the footprints of the Lord.

(Leah Goldberg)

It is not difficult to guess some of the subject matter of their early poetry. Thus Shlonsky begins a poem 'I remember the day I left a town in Ukraine':

*I remember the day I left—I was still a lad
The skies were washed and ironed as a silken blouse—
So they always dressed up for me.
And the garden lawns were groomed
And festive.
But why were the house-gates buttoned
Like men in uniforms?*

(Shlonsky)

This same Shlonsky is now one of the most important of living poets writing in the language of Hebrew. Apart from his own creative work he has translated Shakespeare, Moliere, Gogol and Simonov for the Hebrew theatre. It may be interesting to tell that when he was fifteen his father chanced upon one of his poems and could not believe that it was his own son who had been the author. The family was so incredulous that a detective agency was employed to uncover the source of his plagiarisms!

In the earlier days in Palestine there was so much to do, swamps had to be drained, forests to be planted, deserts to undergo a metamorphosis, the foundations of a new agriculture to be laid down. Their poetry was work and their vision was through work. Shlonsky was of them and singing: 'O dress me mother dear with a coat of splendour; with dawn lead me to work'. Inevitably with the dignity of labour concurrently arose the dignity of poetry; settlements were commenced *and kept on going*, cities were built and poems were created to praise them. The land, the air, appeared to those so intimate with this land, this air, to be theirs alone. Two thousand years had pointed to this, a home and a love, and a feeling of security.

*Your orphans will not cry. I have gathered them.
The light of innocence and poverty is strewn over me
Should you go walking, come sit on my bank:
There is no river in the world as quiet as mine.*
(Alterman)

And yet could the fear of centuries, the sense of insecurity that has become another dimension of the Jew, be swept away in a score of years? Perhaps Israel is all a dream? Perhaps Tel Aviv is another illusion?

*The light,
Light of our city,
What does it do,
What does it do alone, alone
When we shut our eyes for a moment?*
(Alterman)

And even the land, the earth they had worked with, lived with, died with, that which was most theirs, the most near and the most loved, the only loved,—seemed during those sudden moments of illumination, even like our own lovers, the most strange, the most alien . . .

*We have crossed many and many a soil
But you are the most alien of all . . .*
(Alterman)

Today in modern Israel there is a great desire to read also the works of traditional and contemporary European writers: Shakespeare, Pushkin, Rilke, Mann, Garcia Lorca, and many others have been translated into the language of Hebrew. And Israel has its own

theatre, its own music, its own ballet, its own painting, its own prose and its own poetry. This is surely enough that such a people have their dignity intact.

Not all Jews however have flocked to Palestine and here in England we have a number of young Jewish poets whose language and whose tradition is English, and yet they are no less Jews though they cannot read or write Hebrew, nor know very much consciously of the wealth of Hebrew culture. Poets like Humbert Wolfe, Isaac Rosenberg, Siegfried Sassoon have already added to the greatness of British literature, and now there are young poets, Jews, now more than ever before, whose promise may easily flower into further gifts for English poetry. It is true that their root is not the root of the Hebrew writers, their root is an English root, their images are Christian and their attitudes to Life and Death are not always Judaic. One would not expect it so. But their peculiar position in the society of today gives them a certain, if vague, common denominator, for they can never escape, however assimilated, their first home life, where candles were lit on Friday night and where on Passover a glass of wine was set aside for the angel. Let us hope that their poetry, along with the work of the Hebrew writers, will one day contribute not only to Jews everywhere, but also to the dignity of humankind.

DANNIE ABSE

Note.—The following selection consists of new poems by young Jewish-British poets. It is not intended to be comprehensive for there is not space to include poems by such other young Jewish writers as John Singer, Alban Levy, Michael Hamburger, Arthur Boyars, Ernst Sigler, etc.

EMANUEL LITVINOFF

The Dead Sea

I

Here is another shore, and the sea calm:
the bird of darkness who hovered
night-long above our prow, gone.
Now dawn seeps up the estuary.
The veiled river lies unwreathed of sleep,
marsh-grasses, mud flats, naked now of dark,
surprise the land-starved eye. Punished by storm,
our gaunt exhausted ship rides anchor,
awaiting a convalescent tide.
Another voyage ended.

What country have we found,
we who are outcasts,
foreign in every harbour, strange in none,
wanderers of the cold prodigious seas
our compass set to the magnetic pole of God?
What country have we found?

Is this land green? Are forests here?
Or does a golden, savage bird
fly through its burning skies?

II

Ah, but we know it now. . . .
Mark in the tide's ebb
where the foundered vessels lie—
Ninevah, Troy, Babylon, Rome,
legendary beauty in the sea-bed's tomb.
Mark them! Mark them! what they have become
who were not merely stone and water, fire and air,
but gold and amethyst, precious with the rare
treasure of knowledge, now only embers
charred in the sea's fire.
And we, veterans of many disasters, our dead
afloat on many wandering tides, remember
only how they looked as corpses:
not how the torches of their eyes
flamed bright with arrogance against the dark.

Ah, but we know it now. There
is the tavern where the women sleep
sprawled in the trampled sawdust
stained with the detritus of merriment.
We cannot lie easy in those arms;
the windy voices of the dead walk
in the casual asylum of their heads
crying for remembrance,
for it is not easy to assess the dead
here at the river where we lie
down by the ditch of Stepney,
or stalking the many waterfronts of exile.
How much of us lies with them? All
but the pin's node of an iceberg,
fathoms under water. It is not easy
to assess the dead, terror and truth.
The broken harbours and abandoned cargoes
prolong the sea's grief only by a moment.

At most, the lament of seagulls
screaming in the dark defrays that silence
where the proud galleons go down,
down, deeper than sleep, where no seasons
trouble the cold perpetual midnight
and the womb retains its fruit.
At most, the lament of seagulls

and for us nothing
but the great names sinking fast—
Ninevah, Babylon, Rome, the ship of London—
and this handful of loot rescued from the holds,
a heap of wheat, marble, crumbling parchment,
the tarnished gold of the mind's words:
seaweed harvest.

III

We can do nothing in this foreign harbour,
this place of sleepers dreaming of history.
History is death, history is our gallows,
history is the fall of earth upon a coffin;
the sea knows no history and is intransigent.
What do the women speak in the tavern,
what songs are sung, what slow
beguiling dances argue the body's weakness?
'Come, lover, receive this kiss.
'The journey has its end: this, lover, is the end.'
We cannot lie in those too-easy arms
wooing the spent oblivion of pain.
The end, too, has its journey.

So it comes to this, where shall we sail?
Where go from here? . . .
Shall it be said that we
who navigate the night's waters,
steering by instinct among wreck and reef,
wise in paradox, who know the rock
beneath the open face of calm,
the anger under the skin of love,
know not to what America
we bring discovery? . . .

Let the dead speak for the dead,
the sea will answer for its sons.
Out of the whirlpool of storm,
the salt agony of many oceans,
and the fiery torture of the burning sun,
will come the dream's renewal—
that unknown continent,
that innocence of history,
that clear, unravened sky.

RUDOLPH NASSAUER

Poem

What if these torturers
extracting confessions of glimpses of lust
should suddenly cease their play?
Suppose the night grow calm,
that eyes turn craters,
that from now shall no more be
eruption by dream or fancy?

Suppose the shore die
and worms decay under the sand
leaving no patterned heaps
to mark their grave,
that the masons of the land
drink dry the sea
to celebrate the dry end of the earth?
that there shall no more be
grains left wet by sea,
sand left wet by suckles of the sea,
the shore left burning cinders
from the fire of the sea?

Suppose that the mind's women
and the pictures on the wall
loose their power,
that night and body suddenly
become fallen soldiers, no longer
in the service of the king?

I know after summer has done with summer,
after the money of young years is spent,
after the fibres of my live-long love
will cease to quake my earth
this time shall come.

What then of the schooled angels,
of the well-trained circus for the child in me,
of the glimpses of women seen
through the keyhole of heart,

of the ashes on the shore,
the husk of corn,
the drowning sailor within sight of land?

I know this time, this time
of angels at their goal, shall come,
bringing perfection and impotence
like two old spinsters waiting for their death.

NORMAN KREITMAN

Call No Man Guilty

Call no man guilty this night.
Do not lament the altar wine
spilt in the turning of the silent prayer,
nor the gaping peasant with his moonspun crown
leading gaunt Christ to the darkened stair.

Do not condemn the falling star
seeking a kingdom on the night's wide breast.
Search you also the fire of the holy breath
for the hands that fuse a ferocious birth,
as well as the poet, exiled from death.

What is called sin is the gall of failure
burning the iris of the angel's eyes.
By the crucifixion of guilt alone
shall a man name his God as he dies.

For each man carries a hundred ghosts
bears a landscape between his palms,
contains two worlds, the dreamer and his dream
laughing in each other's arms.

And each world bears its private cross—
dark solitudes twined like lovers
in the morning fields of light.
O scatter your tears beyond Eden!
Call no man guilty this night.

DENISE LEVERTOV

Poem

The sun always simplifies the truth,
saying, 'Here I lay
a square of yellow light about the page,
your hand, the oranges; there I delay
on your neighbours' roofs. You live
among the simple shapes I clarify—
the orange round as O, the long window.
The woman waiting and the man returning
share in my formal beauty, have their places
set in the coloured picture I compose'.

But winds, more subtle, slam the swinging lattice,
shake the water in the glass—its image
moving like fishes on the startled ceiling—
blow shadows through the room; a shadow marks
the strange un-roundness of a pitted orange.
And man and woman, face to face in the waying
shine and dark of a room's caprice, understand
that the wind, abundant liar, poet of change,
tells more of the truth than the sun's
fanatical justice. They live
only by grace of love, deeper
because of the sun's weakness, the flowing of time and the wind.

DANNIE ABSE

Confessions, Excuses, and Accusations

I

It is enough to endure the thief in the clock
and the apple-flesh turning brown after the bite,
it would be enough to see our first shy loves
passing us by, hand in hand, with their strange sad children;
especially now sunlight creeps down the streets of London,
and we observe the ceremony of the season: lilac peeping
over garden walls and golden necklaces of laburnum.
These alone, these easy damnable perfumes alone,
would be enough, and natural doubt.

I am no more than my neighbour,
I would be gentle and joyful, not perpetually angry.
I too, am tired of calamities. I too have seen
their salt faces torn apart like red silk;
(it would be enough), and so would insist:
'I am not here, I am not here', and would forget
the kneeling man who clamours to the stars.
I have seen what none should ever see.
I also awake from dreams the colour of skin.

II

When the dream becomes seemingly certain and only dream,
when the heart blows up and my whole being
flows out of me, the sly faces and the fabulous places
I carried unknowingly,—slow paradise of distant lands
and hands not my own issuing out of me, when
the red dust lies on the ground dangerously beating;
and this all some beginning though I had no wish
to begin again, having made the exodus many times,
having failed many many times, having explored
their inch of pain and returned again to genesis,
(the beautiful alone being enough to bear)
say I cannot sing again.

I cannot imagine millions and would even forget
the solitary man who clamours to the stars;
but the dream does not end, there being another skin
beneath the skin, another dream beneath the dream. Say I
have seen
too much (the luminous wings against the window-pane)
become insensitive to the recurring decimal of calamity.
I have heard what none should ever hear,
I have feared what none should ever fear,
Certainly I cannot sing the same song again.

III

Instead, I accuse:
under the horns of the moon's golden calf
there is no destination, and the City goes by, goes by,
with petrol in its heart, advertising angels.
I accuse! I accuse!
The soldier opened his eyes for the last time,
and the grass was green for the first time, very green,
but then he already smelt of the earth.
I accuse you because you are wounded,
I accuse myself because I cannot speak your wound.
I have loved what none should ever love,
I accuse the impotence of angels.
I have been where none should ever go.
I accuse Abel for not killing Cain.
I have done what none should ever do,
now I accuse Christ for being crucified.

EDITORIAL NOTE

Your editor is willing to stand humbly in a large white penitential shroud for two capital errors in recent issues of POETRY QUARTERLY. In Spring, 1948, *Threnody for a Ruined Landscape* was by G. A. Wagner, and not by W. S. Graham. In the Summer, 1948, *Writer* was by Patrick Anderson, and not by G. S. Fraser. To guard against further mistakes of this nature will contributors please put their names on *every* page of MSS. submitted? Thank you.

THE POETRY OF JOHN WALLER

I know people who admire John Waller's poetry very much and other people who feel an immediate strong dislike for it. The admiration and the dislike are both reactions to a personality which Waller expresses very fully in his poetry, not attempting to disguise what is soft, or weak, or sentimental in his character. He is not ashamed to display his admiration for unfashionable writers like Flecker and Barrie, or his interest in a literary period, like the 1890's, which it is fashionable to dismiss as minor, decadent, and essentially tedious. He talks about his childhood dreams, with a sense of their being pretty and fetching, as if Freud had never written. And he has few inhibitions about the kind of feeling he is expressing, so that people who are out to pick on him can find plenty of passages like this:

*The airman dancing with his bride
Or breakfasting before he died,
The girls who waved the fated out
To sadness far from merriment,*

*The soldier who looked strange among
The brightly continental throng
And sailors at the gay Fleet Club
Or rolling drunken from a pub,*

or from the same poem, a long and ambitious one:

*And a captain who seemed not twenty-one
Wearing the M.C., proudly, like a kitten
Furry with life, tenderly touched the hand
Of a young corporal. 'Let's have some fun',
His eyes seemed to say to the other's eyes.*

Nobody could complain about the choice of words in the second passage there, but many people would find the feeling expressed embarrassing; the cosy, diminishing simile of the kitten furry with life, the image of the two young men touching hands like very small children, and saying, 'Let's have some fun', like very small children, illustrate a recurrent tendency in Waller to retreat from the complications of adult life in our age to the jolly romps, the party teas, and the torn picture-books of the nursery. The feeling expressed in the first passage, on the other hand, though conventional, is a feeling that most people would accept: 'How sad that the young go out to die,

from a scene of commonplace happiness!' But we may look a little askance at the choice of words. Waller, in fact, has a small but rather strictly sifted vocabulary. Essentially a writer who has muted a lyrical impulse to a conversational tone, he claims never to use in verse the sort of phrase he would feel it affected to use across a bar. But he does not say across a bar, 'I was very *drunken* last night', and in conversation he would, like the rest of us, talk about jolly foreign crowds rather than brightly continental throngs and about gaiety rather than merriment. The choice of words here, therefore, gives an odd unreality to the passage, as does the rather jogtrot metre; one has a sense that Waller knew here what the correct feelings about such a situation should be, but for some reason did not have these correct feelings very deeply. In the other passage, his feelings were deep, but he failed to realize how much of his own desire for a retreat towards childhood gaiety he was projecting into the situation, with the result that the incident, which for all I know may have actually occurred, has the air of being rather gratuitously *invented*. Either Waller's language or his sentiment is liable thus to go, at times, unexpectedly soft on the reader. A lack of hardness, where most people would like hardness (and the presence, sometimes, of hardness where most people do not like it) gives his verse an occasional flavour of self-indulgence. This, however, is not its most characteristic flavour, and its presence may cause a reader to be unfair to other, more positive qualities.

Waller is a poet whose range of themes may seem, according to one's personal feelings about the matter, either monotonously narrow or unusually strictly adapted to the range of his sensibilities. Some sociologist whom I read once made a distinction between the intellectual, to whom a life of pleasure may be fatal, and the artist, to whom it may be a necessity. Waller is the artist rather than the intellectual, and he does not feel the moral compulsion that most artists of our time feel to try to be an intellectual, too. Thus his writing is quite free from the tight, congested, strained feeling that is typical of much contemporary verse; its fault, if anything, is that it seems to flow too slackly and easily. His poetic vocabulary is smaller than that of most of us, and has an unusual purity and elegance for our age, for the simple reason that he has never felt the urge to use in his verses any of the technical terms of religious or political philosophy. He does do quite a bit of thinking in verse, but it is thinking based on the range of his personal experience. That is the experience of a successful young man who enjoyed Oxford and who on the whole enjoyed the war, but who takes a rather cold and sad view of

human history. History, in fact, is the one subject outside literature in which Waller is something of an expert. He views history essentially as a *spectacle*, at once tragic and ennobling, and his war experience has taught him to view contemporary life in the same way. His poems express admirations for certain kinds of people, and for certain kinds of people only; the young, the beautiful, the brave, the gay, the whimsical, the generous. Such people are seen in strictly only three or four kinds of situation: as involved in love affairs; as struggling with ominous dreams; as enjoying themselves at parties; or as heroically dying. What most people consider the serious business of life is for Waller only a kind of drab backcloth to the sort of situation that appeals to his strong sense of theatre. He is peculiarly fascinated by actors, and when he writes in general terms of human life his usual image for it is that of a complicated play, involving both disguises and surprises, moving out digressively, but returning in the end to its original theme; and what he admires in the individual human actor is the stylish playing of a tragic part. His general attitude to the world, then, is one of rather formal pity and horror—formal, because the tragic background of life is, after all, the necessary framework to the individual performances that arouse his enthusiasm. His attitude to the general human situation, then, is an oddly cold one. He seems to feel that men, in the mass, deserve what they get. But his attitude to love, to parties, to dreams, and to violent death is full of the admiration he feels for the individual performance, the compunction he feels about the individual fate.

He admires individual energy. And the source of such energy, he feels, is the passion of love. He recognizes that as subject to as many disasters as the passions of religion and politics; but its satisfactions, he feels, are more real. He writes at the end of his first volume, *Fortunate Hamlet*:

Live

As for love: carry the thunder of raging youth

Hopeful to new building: live as for love,

and at the end of *The Merry Ghosts*, hardened by experience, he says:

. . . *live*

Away from the private and personal island

Encouraging the storm.

Live, that is, as for danger: the concept of love has become insensibly merged with that of danger, and, talking of leaving those he loves, he says significantly:

*I rarely felt
Poorer at something lost, but leaving for
Another country,*

just as, talking of his army training, he speaks of the intensification of the sense of life brought about by hardship—about the spartan place ‘in which, because one hated it, at the same time one really lived’. He pities the soldier ‘held like a slave to a patch of ground’ but all the same feels that it is a ‘great occasion’ that set him there. (He comes of a family that has produced one famous poet, Edmund Waller, but also many soldiers.) His sorrow for those whom the war has killed sets them in a perspective of the ‘great occasion’:

*The dispassionate guns obliterate the season
Unmerciful to lover and friend;
With particular treason
This time of year
Pursues the young to a cruel end . . .*

These lines themselves are oddly detached and dispassionate, and the mood of much of Waller’s poetry, in fact, might be described as that of passion recollected in the moment of its exhaustion. The surface of his verse is at once ravaged and calm; or flat after a storm.

He feels the world to be cruel and dangerous, and about all the world’s good moments there is for him an atmosphere of the ‘last time’. He can occasionally convey the tension of his expectations in a frightening image:

*but gulls
Crashing down from a terrible and blue sky
Signify other dreams,*

but the landscape interest of his poetry is limited by the fact that he is not a *visuel*, he cannot recognize buildings or streets, let alone common trees or flowers. His images thus come mainly from early dreams or childish fantasies, and have often rather a relaxing effect:

*a haunted garden
With roses that bore the scent of your hair
Awakened kindness lest the heart harden,*

and therefore such modern objects as he introduces into his verse tend to have a pure dream-symbol value, e.g.:

*Aeroplanes thunder through the night
But stillness makes up our delight,*

where the aeroplanes are less interesting as dating the poem in the time of the early German raids than as implying a set of erotic comparisons. The vibration of the aircraft creates an effect like stillness; the stillness of the lovers is broken by the thunder of the heart. In love, as in flying, we control a beautiful and dangerous instrument. The fear of falling is a common phobia in both fields. How many of these implications would be in Waller's mind, consciously, one does not know, but, in fact, the aeroplanes cease to be themselves and become a symbol for the thunder and power of Eros.

Like all writers who accept the main European tradition of romantic love, Waller equates the ideas of love and death. He says, where he puts the equation most concisely:

*But love is the death
That my heart dies from . . .*

He does not use 'love', as many young poets do, in the sense of charity or good will: with his fastidious sense of language, his word for charity or good will is 'kindness'. By love, he means the passion, with all its knives and fountains, and he is aware of the full price to be paid for the cult of this passion as an absolute. Just as he is in the tradition when he equates love with death, so also is he in the tradition when, in lines that seem to me to have an almost Elizabethan richness, he equates love-making with warfare:

*One night I held all Europe in my arms,
And all the East, Asia and Africa,
Limbs were their armies, those easy lips
Their long grey fleets breathing of threat
And doom, even each whisper seemed
An airman gliding on his swallow path . . .*

Compare that with

*'Tis now since I sat down before
That foolish fort, a heart . . .*

Just as the seventeenth century naturally described seduction in terms of a siege, so the fulfilment of passionate love, eager, cruel, and sterile, expresses itself today quite naturally in terms of global war. Part of the climate of an age is to be sought in its metaphors. We compare love and war, and have compared them for centuries, because

they *are* like each other; war, in our civilization, is exciting and love is cruel. It would be the sign of the beginning of a new civilization, of an age of peace, if poets should cease to find it natural to describe the most passionate of human acts in terms of the most violent, the most painful, the most destructive of human activities. There is no sign yet of any such change; the identification of passionate love and war still appears glaringly obvious to the poetic, or to the subconscious mind; in both fields the wish to take risks and the impulse to dominate seem still to be the great motives.

With the cult of passionate love in Waller's poems, there naturally goes the lucidity of exhaustion. Passions are made to be exhausted, and those who drain every cup, who refuse no challenge, must walk in a world of ghosts:

*Still, in remembrance, most bright things exist,
Flowered by memory, eminent and pale,
Like great occasions seen across a mist,
The ghostly climax of a favourite tale.*

Whether this life of passion, and the exhaustion of passion, and the ghosts left by passion, is enough in itself, is a question which Waller must often have asked himself, and his frequent retreats to a world of childish whimsicality (attractive to some tastes, and rather embarrassing to others) show that he is not quite consistent in his cult of passionate love, that he feels an occasional nostalgia for the days of the nursery when love meant something unexciting, reliable, and kind. Of his later poems, in his volume *The Kiss of Stars*, the ones that interest me most are the more thoughtful ones, in which he begins to question and probe at the traditional passionate values which he has chosen as the basis for his life. In a poem called 'The Circling Voyage', he sees human life (and perhaps particularly his own life) as involving a series of errors, which nevertheless we must make, for we learn lessons from them which we could not learn otherwise; it is also a series of ironic disappointments:

*Success will bring you then to a sugar world
Like the treacherous sugar lacing a drab cake.
Too much indulging in pleasure is a mistake
But the roaring carnivals will hold you enthralled.*

At any stage, if you look back, you become full of doubts, but you must carry on:

*The circle is life
On a small revolving scale, a rounded fable,*

*Until now returning to the straight rail
Brings triumphant life. So much dross left behind
And lusts gratified! Only the blind
Should see no point in it at all.*

Yet the real point may prove to be other than we thought it was, romantic love may not have been the main thing after all:

For circles are sexless, being dominated by will . . .

*Thus you will see this subtle play quick ended.
Everything was different to what you thought, it was
A monstrous trickery. Yet if time in circling was loss
No time will relieve you, frozen and undefended.*

I do not know whether in this image of circling Waller may have had in mind Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. Your circling either in the end takes you upward to the Earthly Paradise on top of the Purgatorial Mount or, if you are in *Inferno*, and 'time in circling was loss', down to the last icy depths where the traitors lie embedded, 'frozen and undefended'. The poem, at least, seems to probe rather hard at the meaning of life, and in another poem in this volume, a short one, Waller shows what, for him, is an unusual philosophical preoccupation:

*Fiction is truth's cunning handmaiden
Engaged for a small salary each week
To colour truth's lies and make all speak
For truth's great justice when unjustly given.*

*Fiction is truth's most poetic lie
Who will conceal with scent and gay dresses
What lies beneath truth's subtle curses;
Fiction will wink at but never say: 'die'.*

*Truth can use fiction but fiction never truth.
That is unfortunate; between them they kill
All our most beautiful lies, and make ill
The things we saw happen, history and love.*

Fiction can never use truth, though truth can use fiction. In recognizing that fact, Waller appears to me to be recognizing that in his earlier, more romantic poems he was often taking up an attitude that reflected literature rather than life, or that expressed his personality (our personality is largely a fiction of ours) and not his character

(our character is our inescapable truth). His later poems seem to me to mark a considerable advance on his earlier work, in that he has ceased to try to use truth for the purposes of fiction; he is expressing his character, and in the excellent dry and sad and humorous poem called 'Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley' he appears to me at once more completely objective and yet more truly in character than, perhaps, in any other piece of his:

*This was an age that might have proved so famous
With wealth to spend and actors who were able,
But somehow it blazed quite out in a swirl of tinsel
And naphtha lights and scandalous talk at table . . .*

*Poor Beardsley died consumptive in Southern France—
'Destroy the bad and obscene' were his last chores.
And only Lord Alfred was left to tell the story
So many times that he nearly survived two wars.*

The dryness of that is a new and welcome quality in Waller's verse, and though *The Kiss of Stars* as a whole is not without its occasional damp lapses, it seems to me to mark a maturing of Waller's attitudes. He started off as a frankly romantic poet, willing, one may say, to accept in life only attitudes which he already approved of in other people's poetry. What was not 'romantic' in life—that is, most of life—was just to be rejected as so much waste material. One would have expected him, therefore, as a poet, to die young, like most romantic poets. For the romantic attitude to life is, in fact, an error, though an error which it would be wrong not to commit at some time, since we learn lessons from it that we cannot learn otherwise. If we start off in life with a romantic attitude, we learn sooner or later that our attitude is a fiction (that is, that it is not really a workable attitude in most contexts). If we still think of it as the only attitude for poetry, we come to think of poetry as a sort of sacred fiction, which must not on any account be contaminated with truth; or we think we can rig truth to prop our fiction, which is even more certainly fatal. Few young romantic poets prove willing, when they reach this impasse, to revise their whole attitude, to start with truth, and use fiction in the service of truth. Few of them, having built up wonderful poetic personalities, are willing to start building again, this time on the basis of their real characters. They are stuck with an attitude and, like Henry Treece or like Alex Comfort, they mark time. Waller, for his part, seems to me to be groping onwards. He has a future as a poet, as so many young men who started with

the same romantic promise have not; simply because he has recognized that, though we may learn many important truths from our first eager errors, we must leave the errors and cling to the truths, if we do not want both our lives and our verses—victims of romanticism—to remain frozen for ever in a frigid fictitious pose. Waller now describes himself as a ‘natural writer’. The phrase is rather curt and cryptic like most of his attempts at intellectual formulation; but it indicates, at least, that he is a poet who has his feet on the ground.

G. S. FRASER

IMMODERATE, MODERATE, AND AMOK

ROBERT PAYNE, *Songs* (Heinemann, 8s. 6d.); THEODORE SPENCER, *Poems 1940-47* (Harvard University Press, \$2.75); TERENCE WHITE GERVAIS, *Patrick Freed and Other Poems* (Fortune Press, 7s. 6d.); *Little Reviews Anthology 1947-48*, edited by DENYS VAL BAKER (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 10s. 6d.).

Mr. Robert Payne is a force of nature; a poet with the mind of a ‘straight’ Dylan Thomas and an unself-conscious style which savours of Walt Whitman.

So much—at the start—for the temper of his writing; and now a word or two concerning his intention. ‘The poet’s task in our time,’ he writes, ‘is neither to pity nor to warn, but to praise what remains to be praised, remembering that all life, vigour and grace are holy, and that the saints are nearer to God than the angels.’ ‘Grief,’ he continues, ‘is prayer,’ and ‘prayer,’ he adds, ‘is always praise.’

From this most commendable theory of expression, let us pass to consider the atmosphere which the world of his verse establishes.

Now all his poetry, it seems, is a kind of primordial carnival of flowers; a feast-day to celebrate pre-logical ultimates; a proper primitive’s picnic, so to speak. Allowing, next, that the primitive has a high poetic value of its own (‘Exuberance is beauty’, according to Blake), we must, at this point, carefully distinguish between the poetry of living or of being, and the poetry of writing and of speech. To the former of these belongs the primitive, with its song and dance in the sphere of actual existence; its Vienna-waltz abandon, not on paper, but in the flesh. Sometimes, of course, the two go together, as in Solomon’s ‘Song of Songs’, in Swinburne’s ‘Atalanta in Calydon’ choruses, and in certain pages of Henry Miller; but save for some few rare passages, this wedding, I feel, does not occur in the verse of Mr. Payne.

To be more specific, let us examine his poem 'To the Greater Sun in Majesty' in which he discourses of miracles and marvels. Now as we are somewhat chary these days of accepting fresh evangels of resurrection, brand-new panaceas for our global chaos, whether social, economic or religious in nature, we look for the outward symptoms of these glories in the medium proper to the writer as a poet—in other words, we look to discover a recreated marvel or miracle of language. In this anticipation we are often disappointed; for we find instead only the catch-words of the marvellous; the husks of a forced and untransmitted vision:

*I shall come with the red-gold rain of my peace,
of my awakening.
I shall shed tears, I shall be made one
With the smoking altars of God in the heavens
of eminence.*

Sometimes, however, the glory breaks through in bright but fitfully unsustained displays; producing a train of imagery which rather suggests, with its solar effulgence, the later verse of Edith Sitwell; a masculine Miss Sitwell, as it were, capable of a higher tempo of excitement:

*I shall come in my holy armour, my mane of red
lion-hair.
My striped body perfumed, naked, falling out
of all the seven heavens
Like a thief in the night, masked with gold,
conjuring the world
To the peace of my golden eyes, the glint of
my ear-rings.*

The idea of rebirth in a world such as this is not an easy one for the mind to conceive; and it seems that Mr. Payne, in moods of wish-fulfilment, has yielded to the spell of improbable hopes, thereby producing a poetry of exotic and induced optimism; a poetry of auto-suggestion, as it were. Such is his poem 'The Red-Gold Rain'.

Another deficiency in his verse—present, for example, in the poem 'Song for a Martyr'—would seem to originate from the fact that his heart appears to be too swiftly ignited for his brain to find time to assemble the right words. He is, we might hazard, too emotionally trigger-happy.

This spontaneity of heart and immediacy of expression, as in his ballad of 'China', procures for his poems the means by which a

powerful first impression is created; an effect not always retained on second reading.

Mr. Robert Payne, at least, is never jaded; and there is generally a sort of sprawling magniloquence about his verse, which very occasionally gathers itself together, controlled, untrammelled yet self-contained, as in his piece 'O Sleeping Lovers', one of the finest war poems I have read.

Whereas the temper and style of Mr. Payne is powerfully Dionysian, that of Mr. Spencer is cautious by contrast. His is an Apollonian mind. Art, he tells us, is 'the nightmare's antidote', and in the concept implied by this phrase his weakness and strength as a poet is suggested.

Mr. Payne's verse, one can say, is like a heat-wave, but Mr. Spencer always guarantees that we may read him without fear of sun-stroke. This safety is sometimes a little unexciting. None the less, at his best, there is a kind of sober levity of expression: the appropriate outward dress, no doubt, of his subtle, prudent, and neat cast of mind; a mind whose philosophy might be described (as present in his poems 'Two Kinds of Answer', 'Song for Concentration' and 'Two Ways') as one of resignation but not of rejection—a philosophy of not unhelpful patience.

Mr. Spencer's style is generally elegant; tailored in a dry and unpretentious fashion; a cut which is both correct and easy, and which does not want for experimental detail, usually subsumed within a formal whole. One ungainly trick he possesses, however, is that of creating substantives, describing states of mind or categories of being, bare-faced, out of adverbial speech, as when he writes:

*I saw the wind of After
Carve scores on the cheeks of Nero*

or

*And, when my darling is close in my arms,
Proved is the joy that crowds out of Always.*

Above the general level of quiet, good work, unassuming and untransfiguring, which this volume offers the reader, two poems stand out in singular isolation. These are, 'The Phoenix'—a romantic allegory, written with a cucumber-cool detachment, with wit, precision, and much charm of movement—and the second, entitled 'Epitaph'—a vivacious, lilting, and graceful lament—concerning a 'high-class bitch' and 'a dandy', which my friend John Bayliss is never tired of extolling and reading at poetry recitals.

The author of the third book, *Patrick Freed*, obviously possesses a

natural sense of the sensuous caressive quality of words, which two of his better lines reveal ('My mind moulds into silver what was amber', 'Calm I am silver in air's held caress'). On the whole, though, he appears to deliberately abuse this knowledge, stroking both syntax and sound the wrong way. The result is something uncomfortable as a cat whose fur has been perversely ruffled: a kind of planned cacophony, or variation on a theme of James Joyce, played, so to speak, like a record, backwards; and even his endless host of puns, often amusing in themselves ('wish-fulfoolment', 'pyjamatorious', 'paralcissies', 'totalfollotarian', etc.) do not sufficiently compensate this reader for such a persistent slaughtering of language:

*Though redder and ruder my politics grow,
The public Laval Tory I'll make my own:
My heart is so-so, O! the street is snow-snow;
Exiled, sex-isled, I sleep like a stone.*

Little Reviews Anthology provides us with a mixed but well-sifted bag of some of the most interesting writing, in verse, story or criticism, which appeared in various magazines between 1947 and 1948. Over thirty reviews have given up their dead, and over fifty writers are represented.

For the peruser of these pages probably the most stimulating contributions will be the work of thirty-three poets (including such names as W. S. Graham, Kathleen Raine, Fred Marnau, Ruthven Todd, Louis MacNeice, Mervyn Peake and Howard Sergeant), and essays by Glyn Lewis and D. S. Savage in which two differing assessments of the work of Dylan Thomas are set forth.

DEREK STANFORD

ORCHIDS FOR DR. SITWELL

C. M. BOWRA, *Edith Sitwell* (Monaco, The Lyrebird Press). (Distributed in England by Anglo-French Literary Services Ltd., 5s. 6d.).

This beautifully printed, forty-two page, paper-covered quarto—more handsome, perhaps, than convenient or durable—comes to an England of paper-controls from the more or less legendary musical-comedy principality of Monaco, with something of a fabulous air about it—to my tired eyes at least. The publishers and printers, no less than the critic, have done Dr. Sitwell proud. And indeed she deserves no less than the best. The book is the first of a series of studies of contemporary British poets. Plato, when deciding that poets must be excluded, as dangerously subversive elements, from his ideal planned society, suggested they

should be conducted thence crowned with garlands, and with all honour; I only hope this is not the beginning of the process.

Dr. Bowra's essay is a judicious and a generous piece of praising, rather than a particularly exciting example of criticism. He pays tribute to Dr. Sitwell's integrity and lifelong devotion to the purity of her art. This poet's later work illuminates, in retrospect, her earlier poems, and we now see a unity of development which we might not have suspected. Dr. Bowra's great merit is that of a scholar who can see the long tradition of European poetry as an organic and unbroken whole. In the past he has shown us how the heroic themes passed from poet to poet in that tradition, so that Virgil in the years before Christ joins hands with Milton in the seventeenth century. Or he has illustrated the spirit of poetry working on a single generation, manifesting itself in a Yeats in Ireland, a George in Germany, or a Blok in Russia; the same symbols varied through the medium of different national temperaments and traditions. Against this background he can appraise Dr. Sitwell. For her latest work repeats, with an almost elemental simplicity, the great themes of all poetry—the death and resurrection in seed-time and harvest, the Sun King and the Earth Mother. Dr. Sitwell is essentially a mythopœic writer. Even the fantasies of her early poems are, as Dr. Bowra points out, the kind of mythology which children create within their own family circle—from servants and nursemaids, eccentric relatives and neighbours. Sir Osbert Sitwell's autobiography does much, in fact, indirectly to illuminate his sister's early work.

Dr. Bowra is less successful, I think, in relating Dr. Sitwell to her own troubled and chaotic age. He sees her perception of evil as arising from the contrast of adult experience with the bright, innocent world of childhood. He takes as an example of this an early poem, 'The Spider'. It is one of the most remarkable of Dr. Sitwell's productions, and has often been overlooked. In this poem she comes, I think, nearer to an intellectual comprehension of her subject than in 'Gold Coast Customs', where the horror is too purely emotional to be quite imaginatively convincing. But Dr. Bowra does well to remind us also of this latter poem, which he interprets as the word of a prophetess directed against the sins of a society relapsing into barbarism. But is perhaps too ready to believe that, in the horrors of the late war, a full atonement was made. Dr. Sitwell herself, in 'The Shadow of Cain', seems to suggest that the disaster of Hiroshima revealed a new abyss of human wickedness, an ultimate cold of the heart, which only the Christ who comes in the terrible fire, walking on the seas of blood, can redeem.

JOHN HEATH-STUBBS

POEMS OF A DISHONEST AGE

*'The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.'*

Poems of the War Years, edited by MAURICE WOLLMAN (Mac-Millan, 12s. 6d.).

O pening this book on page 1, I read:

*For me there is no dismay
Though ills enough impend.
I have learned to count each day
Minute by breathing minute—
Birds that lightly begin it,
Shadows muting its end—
As lovers count for luck
Their own heartbeats and believe
In the forest of time they pluck
Eternity's single leaf—*

and for me there was at once much dismay at the ills I knew were impending, a dismay which turned to a kind of horror as I turned the page and discovered by whom these lines were written. This is an illuminating anthology, because Mr. Wollman has compiled it from more than a hundred writers, and, though he cannot in all cases be said to have chosen well, it is doubtful if any replacements of other poems by the same authors would serve to ameliorate its gross effect.

In his introduction Mr. Wollman writes that 'The decay and disorientation of T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" was replaced by the struggle towards optimism of his "Four Quartets"'. Poetry gained in intelligibility and appeal. Many lines and passages had inevitability and memorableness'. And among those that he quotes as having these qualities are these:

*But love and beauty will survive
These grey malignant hours*

Too true! But did anybody doubt it? And could not these great sentiments have been expressed in a manner a little less like that of a schoolgirl in the first flush of disappointed love? The chief dishonesty of most of the contributors to this anthology, a dishonesty which is no doubt encouraged by their readers, is that over and over again they produce just such trite (and no doubt true) statements as if they had produced something wonderful, and generally at the close of poems whose general tone of gloom and despair utterly belies the

brave little gesture of defiance at the end. It is this kind of falsification of experience that we found in most of the poetry of the Georgians, and which presumably caused Robert Graves, a man of great intelligence and honesty, to scrap nearly all his early poems, poems many of which were considerably better than a lot of those printed here. It is not simply a matter of trivial sentiments being put out as the sayings of genius, but being put out with a sentimental dishonesty and a complete lack of any real technical accomplishment. And even more disturbing than the poor show made by almost all the 'war poets' in this anthology are the signs of a similar decay in their elders, many of whom once knew better. Thus, although there is evidence of a great deal of toughness of spirit ('But love and beauty', etc.), there is a lamentable absence of any real toughness of mind. The result is a mere mouthing of noble but trite defiance in lines of extremely weak and feeble verse; protestations that are far from convincing either as statements of the truth or as compelling poetry. Things like this, by John Cromer:

*So long as tree and reed and grass
Sustain and flourish
Through the blizzard of our time,
There will be beauty and delight,
A prize and pattern for our living.*

or again, by the same author:

*We are waiting and the world is waiting
For the sudden call and the quick response.*

How true, how true! But the way most of these poets respond to their experience is so superficial as to be laughable, if it were not that they take themselves so seriously and are taken so seriously by their readers.

There are, however, some good poems here, but most of them from older and established poets, and these too are illuminating in the light they cast on their less talented companions, and the climate of an age to which they are both responding. The difference is seldom so much in the nature of the response they make as in the quality of it. Yeats, Edith Sitwell, Robert Graves, Ronald Bottrall and Auden are also writing in a time of anxiety, fear and dishonesty, and they are well aware of this; nor are their responses always any more hopeful, but they are more honest; and Yeats' poem 'What Then?', though it is about the hopelessness and futility of human ambition and achievement, and therefore a poem of a rather terrible despair, displaying an attitude that some would call decadent, is nevertheless a good poem,

tough and well made. Similarly the qualified optimism of Robert Graves' 'Mid-Winter Waking' is convincing in a way that the pieces I have previously quoted are not:

*Be witness that on waking, this mid-winter,
I found her hand in mine laid closely
Who shall watch out the spring with me.
We stared in silence all around us
But found no winter anywhere to see.*

Auden—and what a good poet Auden is (it needs an anthology such as this to re-point his immeasurable superiority to most of his contemporaries)—Auden, too, is convincing, especially in 'September 1, 1939':

*I sit in one of the dives
On Fifty-Second Street
Uncertain and afraid
As the clever hopes expire
Of a low dishonest decade,*

in which he sees very well the difficulties which afflict us and which have so laid low, either through corruption or defeat, so many of the contributors to this book. These poets all succeed in vigorous and powerful verse in reflecting the anxieties and attitudes of the world around them, anxieties and attitudes which seem to have quite overwhelmed their lesser fellows, whose hearts may be in the right place (perhaps even more in the right place), but whose minds seem to have run to seed under their afflictions, who suffer from what Auden calls:

*The romantic lie in the brain
Of the sensual man-in-the-street.*

Personally, for all one knows, some of these writers may have defaulted—we can none of us be strong in everything—but as poets they are in the clear, and it is as poets that we are considering them and that they are of the greatest value. That goes, too, for Ronald Bottrill and Edith Sitwell (her poems, re-read in this company, and, in her case, very well chosen, are some of the best in the book). But some of the others have defaulted as poets, very badly indeed, in spite of the impeccable sentiments they so freely produce. One of the most shocking things is to find Day Lewis writing like a Georgian, and Geoffrey Grigson producing pastiche of Wordsworth in his poem 'The Children' ('And the waterfall swelled/ The tower knelled', etc.); this latter coming particularly badly from one who has always been so superbly contemptuous of the pastiche of others. Both he and

Day Lewis tend nowadays to write like Georgians, with always, of course, a few Auden-like turns of phrase or rhythms laid on; and this is a fall from grace worth remarking, especially as Day Lewis at least was, in his early days, a poet of altogether greater toughness. Geoffrey Grigson, who always liked the eye to be on the object, and dislikes romanticising about facts and ideas, does not apparently carry his objections as far as romanticising about nature.

In contrast to these, Andrew Young and John Betjeman both contribute some excellent poems, the former having the classically objective eye admired by Grigson, the latter indulging in his usual humorous and nostalgic glimpses at scenery, manners and architecture; where he writes pastiche it is not done dishonestly, but of a purpose and relieved by humour, though he sometimes comes near the borderline in his least witty moments. John Arlott fails at the same type of thing through lack of wit and an excess of pastiche. He does not write poems as well as he writes about cricket, nor so colloquially—perhaps that is why.

There are many others in this book, and I cannot write of them all. George Barker is represented in his best mood; Dylan Thomas' poem, 'To Others Than You', appears better on re-reading than one had thought, and it might well serve him as a standard for making himself intelligible. Herbert Read, on the other hand, is represented with some poor poems—

*This is the hour of retribution
for young men in uniform, for old men in slacks
for children at play . . .*

—which seem to suffer overmuch from the faults of the younger writers he so enthusiastically sponsors. These lines quoted seem to me characteristic of the affliction of which I have been complaining. Its causes—apart from the fact that it is the affliction of a dishonest age hopelessly wishing it were honest? Well, even the good poets here recognize 'the age of anxiety', its lack of faith, or rather not so much its lack of faith as its bitter knowledge of unfaithfulness:

*I never thought to utter or think
. . .
That . . .
. . .
My friends were enemies on stilts
With their heads in a cunning cloud,*

and so on—but they retain their control. The failures don't. What is

most conspicuously lacking in the bad poems of this book is wit or any sense of humour; almost all the good poems have one or the other, and because they are able to look at the age with an ambivalent eye they are not sucked down by the dishonesty and anxiety about them; they do not become part of it and respond with a dishonest optimism or an earnest anxiety—O this wish to be good!—which leaves them incapable of distinguishing between their intention and what they actually perform. It is this particular disparity which inevitably becomes exaggerated in a time of war, and still further in its aftermath—the day of the Black Marketeer—in all human conduct. One would expect to find its reflection in poetry, its symptoms and disorders written about by the better poets, and appearing undisguised—and shatteringly—as a part of the work of the lesser ones, a matter of self-deception where the good intention has to make do for the bad practice.

The only one of the younger poets in this book who seems to me to have written with skill and honesty about this age rather than incorporating its bad features into his work is G. S. Fraser, who is well represented here, and has a tough enough mind to write conversationally and with style about the experiences which leave his co-ævals floundering. The problem at root is a simple one: it is a matter of controlling one's material rather than letting it control you; the poets in question may or may not be 'masters of their fate', as persons, but they are masters of their poetry, which is what matters to us here. The best poems in a dishonest age may not have any solutions to offer, but they will represent their age honestly. That is the most we can hope for. The worst will be full of solutions and dishonest attitudes, and they will represent only the dishonesties and feverish anxieties of their age, however charming a cunning cloud of sentiment or euphony they wrap around their bald and shining heads.

NICHOLAS MOORE

ELEANOR RUGGLES, *Gerard Manley Hopkins* (John Lane, The Bodley Head, 10s. 6d.).

It would be hard to find a great poet whose life was so free from external events as that of Gerard Manley Hopkins. To try to explain this by pointing to the fact that he was a Catholic priest is futile. Fray Juan de la Cruz, for example, was no less determined than Hopkins to dehumanize himself in the service of God, but his life, caught up as it was with the intrigue surrounding the Reformed Carmelite movement, reads just like a religious thriller.

While Hopkins developed his poetry throughout most of his life and arrived at his own brand of 'sprung rhythm' in 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' through wrestling with words from his days as a student at Oxford, Juan de la Cruz inexplicably burst in to mature song after he was hurled into jail at Toledo. The temptation for the biographer of one like Hopkins to compensate for the lack of human interest by getting hysterical about spiritual and æsthetic conflicts in the manner of certain worshippers of Van Gogh, Rilke or Kafka, must be very strong indeed. But Miss Eleanor Ruggles avoids this like the plague. Her book is astonishingly lucid and factual, and probably sheds as much light on Hopkins in just over two hundred well-written pages as the Victorian biographer David Masson did in the case of Milton in six huge volumes. To call Hopkins a revolutionary poet is as true as it is false to ascribe the same quality to someone like Mayakovsky. Political and technical reasons alone do not make a creative artist revolutionary. One must be very naïve indeed to imagine that Hopkins was revolutionary simply because he thought the idea of Communism was just, or that he used 'sprung rhythm'. As for the latter device, he knew very well that it already existed in Anglo-Saxon verse and in *Piers Plowman*. The true revolutionary artist is a lion-tamer and saint. He tackles the inexpressible with the fury of a fanatic and eventually succeeds in caging what has hitherto been intangible and unuttered by his fellow-men. Hopkins did this in rather a big way for poetry. I suppose it is not really bad going that the world had to wait only twenty-nine years after his death for the publication of his collected poems. There were many obstacles in the way of recognition during his lifetime. For one thing, there was his own ambivalence towards publication, and then there was the generally wishy-washy attitude to his work by his small group of friends. Miss Ruggles does not take a partisan attitude on the question of his friends. By merely explaining and elucidating she tells all we want to know. And it is obvious that Bridges, himself only a fairly good minor poet, could and should have done more for Hopkins during his lifetime. It is clear that it was Canon Dixon and not Bridges, who had the first genuinely positive and just approach to Hopkins the poet. But it is not at all certain that Hopkins the poet would have profited by publication and applause while he was alive. His rather crippling super-ego, his masochistic tendencies, and his position as a Jesuit, all combined to reject the elixir of recognition. Had recognition come, a sense of profound guilt might have had a shattering effect on the creative fire in him.

HUGO MANNING

BEGINNINGS AND FIGURES

ROBERT HORAN, *A Beginning* (Yale University Press (London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, 14s.)); EDWIN DENBY, *In Public, In Private* (The Decker Press, \$2.50); WILLIAM MEREDITH, *Ships and Other Figures* (Princeton University Press (London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, 11s. 6d.)).

Robert Horan is a difficult, but rather remarkable poet, Edwin Denby a violent and perverse one, William Meredith careful and prim—yet they have a lot in common. They have worlds of their own, and each explores his particular territory with some significance. In his foreword to the book by Robert Horan, W. H. Auden writes that 'To write poetry a man must be endowed with two quite distinct gifts, a love of language and a private vision of the public world', and goes on to warn that 'The diction, for example, of a poet whose love of language is deficient is either too conventional—the noun dictates its own adjective, the rhyme distorts the sense—or too self-consciously strange—when a common adjective or rhyme is really needed he dare not believe it: similarly, his rhythmical patterns are either too mechanically strict or the variations so wildly arbitrary that any sense of an underlying pattern is lost'. And later he remarks, 'In the end, of course, it is not the poet's technique but his vision which decides the value of his work . . .' and that 'Mr. Horan is fortunate in that not only has he been granted an exciting and unique vision of the world, but also . . . discovered early the kind of poetic treatment for which it called'. He does not unfortunately enlarge on this. For Mr. Horan's poetic treatment raises difficulties. He certainly has an original way of looking at the world, and a recurring imagery of curious associations; spiders, lions, fishes, snow, ice, glass and crystal figure most largely in it. He writes mostly of what Mr. Auden describes as 'the contrast between the natural time in which the creatures live, their "arctic, miniature, unwrinkled world", and the historical time which . . . man creates by his acts of living'. The best of his poems are curious and fascinating, but at first sight rather forbidding. For the world he inhabits is a world of crystalline legend, a world into which it is difficult to enter, a task in which his impersonal technique does not help you. It is rather like gazing into those lit glass cases at the zoo, in which you see a small, circumscribed landscape, and have to watch for some time before you see the small creatures that inhabit it—a landscape and life that has a kind of glassy unreality because of the way in which it is lit, but which is nevertheless pleasing when you get used to it. It was a long time before I could see anything in Mr.

Horan's poems, but, beguiled by so famous and certain a recommendation, I eventually became reconciled to them; and it seems to me that, once one accepts his peculiar mythology, it becomes clear how well made his poems are, and the figures of speech and imagery that seemed arbitrary in the manner of so much modern poetry at a first reading come to reveal that they bear a full load of meaning; as, for instance, in 'Suppose We Kill a King', which ends with the lines:

*Like mice beneath a rotting throne, the whispering men
sit in the palace sun,
and as the coffin passes through the towns,
lay down their daggers to put on their crowns.*

a final figure which brings to a powerful conclusion the theme explored throughout the poem, a poem which but for its original treatment might well have ended with a banal platitude. And I think this is Mr. Horan's chief strength, that his poems do move to a conclusion; that they are formal, and his figures justify themselves.

Mr. Denby in comparison is hysterical; yet his poems have a much more immediate impact, and they are not unskilful in their parts. His idiom is colloquial, his vision mud, his language violent:

*The shoulder of a man is shaped like a baby pig.
It terrifies and it bores the observer, the shoulder.
The Greeks, who had slaves, were able to hitch back and rig
The shoulder, so the eye is flattered and feels bolder.*

Often both the imagery and language are striking, but they are never sustained; if the figure's sustained, the language flops, or vice versa; and, though he knows his horror well, even the most vicious passages are inclined to end in a kind of sentimental bathos familiar to all readers of Kenneth Patchen or E. E. Cummings (sometimes). Thus a poem which begins:

*Smelling or feeling of the several holes
Above the jawbone and below the belly
Suggests to searching lovers that the soul's
A slippery gumdrop filled with a sweet jelly*

ends

*Yet licking their lips all lovers are agreed
The soul's a something very sweet indeed.*

The fact is, Mr. Denby lacks control. He has a powerful vision of disgust, and he fairly lashes his words around, yet every poem breaks down somewhere. For instance, 'The Eyes', which is a true shocker,

has so clumsy a second verse that it quite destroys the power of the opening image:

*Love, your two great spheres of eyes
shining almost like blue stones*

Similarly, 'Indiana' begins well:

*Mary went in little smiles
meant a little brighter
anyone without the piles
could frighten or delight her,*

but fritters out most feebly. It is a pity, because he shows enough to show one that some good poetry could have been made from this more disgusting side of contemporary disorders. If Mr. Horan's poems sometimes touch life too little, Mr. Denby's clearly touch it too much. Either their passion destroys their skill, or their skill, where it occurs, is merely the adventitious result of their passion.

How different and yet how similar is Mr. Meredith, whose gentle skill eschews passion, and who has no vision as recondite as Mr. Horan's, who is content to write simply in a contemporary idiom:

*No image takes me from you, being there;
The usual swan, the catalogue of flowers,
Keeping their proper essences and powers,
Are only in their functions like you fair,
And I like bird and blossom virtuous there . . .*

The original of this kind of verse (if it wasn't Auden) is Ruthven Todd, and, though many of these poems are scrupulously neat, I much prefer the original. Mr. Meredith's are neatly constructed figures, but they are dead cold, as, for instance, his 'A Figure from Politics', which is neat enough in all conscience.

If Mr. Denby is deficient in technical skill, Mr. Meredith appears to lack any exciting and unique vision, unless it is, as might appear from the lines quoted, that Mr. Meredith's true vision is somewhat inhibited in the great land of Coca-Cola and Hollywood witch-hunts. However it is, at present his poems are little more than neat exercises, turned out with admirable craftsmanship; that, though, is something that should not be despised. In spite of Mr. Auden's doubts ('His vision of life, on the other hand, cannot be developed in this way; it is probably given him in the beginning once and for all . . .'), it is a beginning.

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